

# HOW TO... Compare and merge documents

Sharing documents is convenient, but it helps to see the changes made to a file by comparing it to a previous version. **Sheona Gillespie** explains how to do this in Word

**W**ord documents are often passed around several people for proofreading, editing or other contributions. The document can end up being very different to its original incarnation. If you use Track Changes in Word, you can see at a glance what another contributor has done, but what if they switched it off? For these occasions, Word has a tool called Compare and Merge Documents. In Word 2002 and 2003, you'll find it in the Tools menu. This tool isn't as straightforward to use as it could be, though, so here we'll explain how to make it work for you. We've used Word 2003.

**1** Pick a document to practise on. For example, copy an original file, and then a later, edited version of that file. If you don't have anything that fits the bill, take an existing document and save it under two different names. Make some changes to the second file and save them. In our case, we have an Original.doc file and a Later Version.doc. We want to merge the Original file with the Later Version document to create a single document containing all the information from both. We've got the Original document open. From the Tools menu, select Compare and Merge Documents.

**2** In the dialog box that appears, click in the Look In box to find the file you want to merge into your current document. In the bottom right-hand corner of the dialog box is a Merge button. Click on the down-pointing arrow just to the right of the button. Select the appropriate action from the menu that appears.

We've chosen Merge Into New Document. This way, the two files being merged are kept intact.

**3** The new document opens in Print Layout view, with the Reviewing toolbar open and notations down the right-hand side of the page indicating any formatting changes and deletions. If it doesn't open in Print Layout view, go to the View menu and select that option; otherwise, you won't be able to see the notations.

Insertions – text that has been added – will be shown in red with a red underline. This isn't ideal, though; there isn't any way to see which document the additions or deletions come from. However, if you're going to accept or reject alterations individually, it shouldn't be too much of a problem.

**4** You may think that merging the file into the current document would get around this. We'd expect that selecting this option from the Merge menu in the Compare and Merge Documents dialog box would result in a document showing only the alterations made in the second file. However, the end result is exactly the same as if you merged the two into a new file. All changes from both documents are shown, with no way of telling from which document the addition or deletion came. But you could compare the documents, rather than merge them. To do this, you need to open the Compare and Merge Documents dialog box again, and this time tick the box next to Legal blackline. The Merge button now changes to read Compare.

**5** The best way to see how the Compare tool works is to use it. If you named your test documents as we did, open your Original document. Then open the Compare and Merge Documents dialog box, making sure the box next to Legal blackline is ticked. Click Compare, and a new document is generated. You might expect to see the Later Versions document shown, with all the parts that differ from the Original document highlighted. In fact, it is the opposite.

This is confusing, because it highlights an addition in the Later Version as a deletion in the comparison document. If you want to compare an updated document with the original, you need to open the updated document and then use the Compare and Merge Documents tool.

**6** If you don't need to see the formatting changes made, untick the box next to Find Formatting in the Merge and Compare Documents dialog box. It's also a good idea to turn this off when you're merging comments and changes from several documents into one document, as Word can store only one set of formatting changes at a time. It is also possible to compare the formatting of two different portions of text in a single document.

Highlight the first section. From the Format menu, select Reveal Formatting. An example of your formatting will appear under Selected Text in the Reveal Formatting panel. Tick the box next to Compare to another selection. Select another section of text to compare it to; any differences between the two will be displayed under Formatting differences.

